

Babenhausen

A Brief History

The earliest written mention of Babenhausen was made in a historical document dated 1236. However, there was a document located in 945 at a monastery in Seligenstadt that also mentions Babenhausen. This document turned out to be a will drawn by a land owner and his wife which granted a landholding known as Babobingen to the monastery. The document from 1236 shows Babenhausen to be one of the oldest towns in the area. In 1295, Babenhausen was granted city rights by King Adolf of Nassau. A portion of these rights included surrounding the city with a wall for protection, construction of a castle, and maintaining a weekly market. This weekly market was held on Wednesdays and is still observed today. The first castle structure was surrounded by three moats and two walls. The castle was used as the official residence of the ruling Counts of Hannau-Lichtenberg as a window seat, a prison, and a kaserne for the "Roter Dragoner". It was also occupied for a short time by U.S. Army after the Second World War. The castle was also used as a home for the aged and is presently privately owned.

Surrounding the "old town" are the remnants of the old wall. During the "Thirty Year" war (1618-1648) Babenhausen was besieged for five weeks by 5000 enemy troops. The town defenders consisted solely of 60 Swedish soldiers. Before the enemy called a truce and pulled out, they sustained over 400 deaths in the fighting while the defenders lost two men. During this battle, many individuals suffered from hunger and illnesses. There were approximately 942 lives lost to the bubonic plague. A story that has been passed down from years ago states that the enemy knew the city was overcrowded with refugees from the surrounding villages. The enemy believed that the city could be starved into surrendering. Even though the city was indeed starving, they retained their cleverness. The town had one hog alive which they tried to fatten. They poked the hog with a pointed stick a few times a day causing him to squeal. When the enemy heard this they began to think that there were several swine a day being slaughtered. Eventually, the hog was released outside the town walls. Once the enemy saw the hog they surrendered, since they believed the town was being well fed and maintaining their strength.

The older roads in Babenhausen are extremely narrow, due to the need of containing the town within the fortification wall. The wall was broken in several places to permit further growth. It is obvious where the newer parts of Babenhausen began because of the width of the streets. Around 1520-1545, many noblemen and rich merchants came from nearby cities to live in Babenhausen. The high and proud timbered houses that were built can be seen in the center of town. The top floor of many homes protruded over the first floor to allow more living space while using as little land as possible. Some homes maintain the original iron railings and door handles (such as crafts were highly respected in the 16th century). There is one house in the older part of town which is extremely interesting, this home was built in 1774 and was a pharmacy.

house. The front panels of the building display different types of healing herbs carved in the colored wood.

The Babenhausen Kaserne was constructed on July 3, 1900. This kaserne was the first to be occupied by the 2nd BN 61 FA Regt. in October 1901. This unit remained until World War I when a hospital was established. In 1918, it was converted into a veterinary hospital and later that year the French troops moved in and remained until 1920. The kaserne remained empty until 1924, when the German police moved in. The Germans stayed until 1929 at which time the building was turned over to the civilians for quarters and was used as a driving school.

At the start of the Nazi regime, the kaserne was taken over for a short time by Storm Troops. Following the Storm Troops, the kaserne was once again controlled by the Field Artillery. In 1936, the German Air Force established and maintained the airfield. The United States first utilized the kaserne as a homeless camp between 1945-1950. Thousands of homeless people and German prisoners were processed through the camp. Babenhausen Kaserne was declared a semi-permanent U.S. military station in 1950. At that time, a complete renovation program was initiated. All permanent buildings were converted, two new sections were built and apartments constructed adjacent to the kaserne.

THE DARK HISTORY OF BABENHAUSEN

Babenhausen originally had seven towers located in strategic intervals around the fortification wall, currently two remain. One of the towers which remains is known as the Hexenturm (the Witch's Tower). In medieval times, this tower was used as a prison. During the 17th century, this tower was used to imprison women who were charged with being witches. Those women suspected of witchcraft were burned alive in the market place. Legend has it, that all women with red hair were burned because of their witch-like appearance. Although it is unlikely that this was the only criterion used by the superstitious people, it is a fact that many women suspected of witchcraft were burned alive in the market square.

There was only one woman in the town named Frau Mueller who worked as a cleaning woman. Every time a man courted here they ended up dead. A total of three men were mysteriously killed. When they searched Frau Mueller's hut they found three small dolls made of rags and straw. Splinters of wood were found stuck in the hearts of each doll. She was quickly taken into custody and imprisoned in the Hexenturm and a week later she was burned to death.

During this period approximately 50 women were executed for being suspected of practicing witchcraft. In 1843, an unexplained plague and mysterious murders began to take many lives. Throughout this time, witch-hunts became very common. During one of the witch-hunts, a woman who was suspected of being related to Frau Mueller was caught and stoned to death, 24 hours after her death, her boyfriend died. His death went unexplained. In 1862, two men were out in the woods gathering wood when they heard a young woman singing. When they went to investigate, the woman saw them and ran off. The two men search her house and found many objects related to witchcraft. The two men burned down the hut and within one week both men were found dead. Again, there was no explanation for their deaths.

During the early 1900's mysterious things began to happen at the Babenhausen Kaserne. Many soldiers on the kaserne began to disappear. In the beginning, these soldiers were thought of as deserters, but as the number increased, people began to become suspicious. Several soldiers who disappeared were known as very dedicated soldiers. In June 1920, a young soldier jumped from the 5th floor of the headquarters building (Community Manager's Bldg.). When they began to investigate, they found five missing soldiers dead in the attic. The man who committed suicide was planning to marry a girl who worked on the kaserne, her last name was Mueller. She was never seen again and there was never an explanation found for the five missing soldiers. For five years following the incident no one wanted anything to do with the haunted headquarters building. Sometime screams and crying sounds were heard coming from the building. When they inspected the building, they found nothing. Strange things continued to happen up until 1948. Dogs and cats were mysteriously dying for no apparent reason. While a man was burying his dog, it came back to life and bit him, 24 hours later, he was found dead. One witness to the incident noticed the dog ran into a women's house

nearby. When they entered her house they found rats and bats in cages and jars of unknown substances. The men in town were told about the incident and they began a plan a trap to catch the woman. When the woman came home and saw the men, she began to run. She was able to escape by running into the kaserne. A guard who was on duty at the gate said he saw no one come in, yet the men who were chasing her saw her pass the guard within five feet. A thorough search was done but nothing was ever found.